

# **Vital Records Management**

## **A Briefing for Federal Agencies**



Pentagon, September 11, 2004

# Federal Records

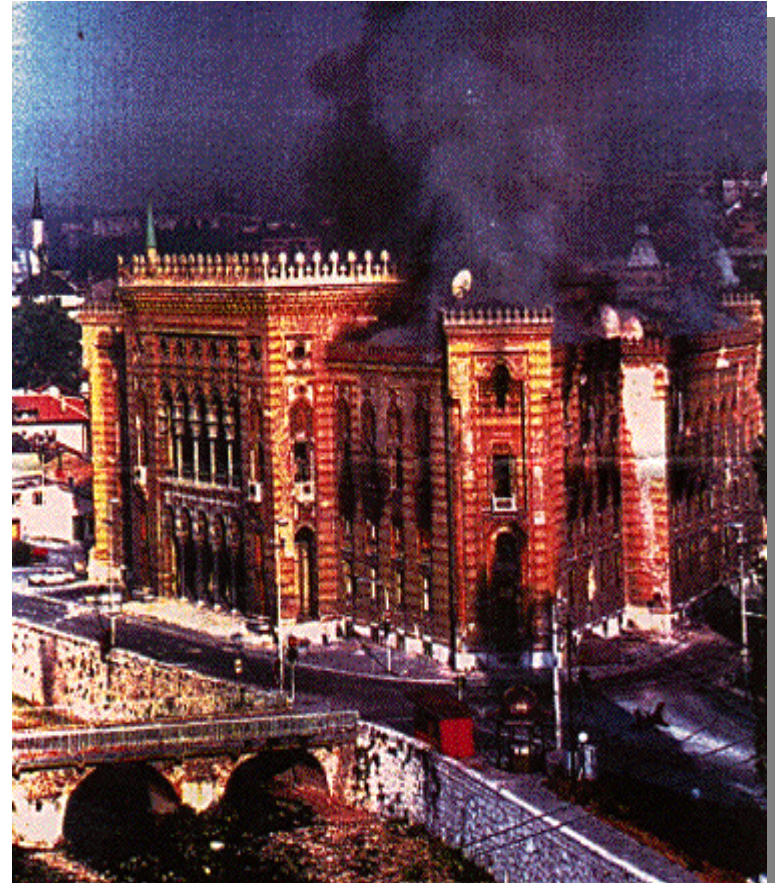
A record is *anything* created or received by agencies *or* contractors in the course of government business. A Federal record can:

- Be on any media: e.g. electronic, digital, microfilm, microfiche, audio tape, video tape, film, paper - you get the idea;
- Be temporary (kept for a limited period of time then destroyed)
- Or permanent (kept FOREVER)

# Vital Records Program

- A vital records program identifies and protects those records that specify how an agency will operate in an emergency or disaster, those records necessary to the continued operations of the agency, and those records needed to protect the legal and financial rights of the government and citizens.

*Paraphrased from 36 CFR 1236*



Sarajevo, Serb gunners attempt to destroy Bosnian identity, 1992

# Vital Records

## Emergency Operations Records: Needed ***During*** an Emergency

- Must be immediately accessible
- Should be on paper
  - For immediate retrieval in the event computer systems do down
- Or immediately available electronically off-site.

# Emergency Operations Records

## *Examples:*

- Emergency/ Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan.
- Staff contact and assignment information.  
Regularly update changes in name, address, phone numbers, etc.
- Orders of succession and delegations of authority.
- Policy, procedural, and systems manuals.
- List of credit card holders to purchase needed supplies.

# Emergency Operations Records

## ***Electronic Format***

- Website & E-Mail - To communicate with and provide information to your employees and your customers. Have website and e-mail access available from alternate site
- Database with up-to-date emergency contact information for all staff

# Rights and Interests Records

Are essential to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of the individuals affected by its activities

- Payroll and accounts receivable
- Social Security and retirement
- Public safety records
- Titles, deeds, and contracts
- Licenses and long-term permits



# Rights and Interests Records

Not necessary to immediately re-establish operations

- Not needed in the first 24 hours

May be available from other sources

- Off-site centralized computer systems
  - Payroll
  - Accounting

May be kept farther away

- Less time sensitive



Shelves and ashen records. Approximately six cubic feet of records were on each shelf.

Burnt Records on Shelves



# Vital Records



- Your *vital records* will be no more than 7% of your total records (3% to 5% is likely)
- Vital records can be either paper or electronic.

# Regulations and Guidance

- 36 CFR 1236 - Management of Vital Records
- Federal Preparedness Circular 65
  - Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Executive Order 12656
  - Assignment of Emergency Preparedness Responsibilities
- Vital Records and Records Disaster Mitigation and Recovery (NARA Publication)

[http://www.archives.gov/records\\_management/publications/vital\\_records.html](http://www.archives.gov/records_management/publications/vital_records.html)

# Federal Preparedness Circular 65 (FEMA)

*The protection and ready availability of electronic and hardcopy documents, references, records, and information systems needed to support essential functions under the full spectrum of emergencies is another critical element of a successful COOP plan. Agency personnel must have access to and be able to use these records and systems in conducting their essential functions. . . .*

# Vital Records Plan

- Vital Records Program must be incorporated into the overall Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)
- Needs clear authority
  - policies
  - authorities
  - procedures
  - designation of a Vital Records Manager

# Agency/Business Impact Analysis

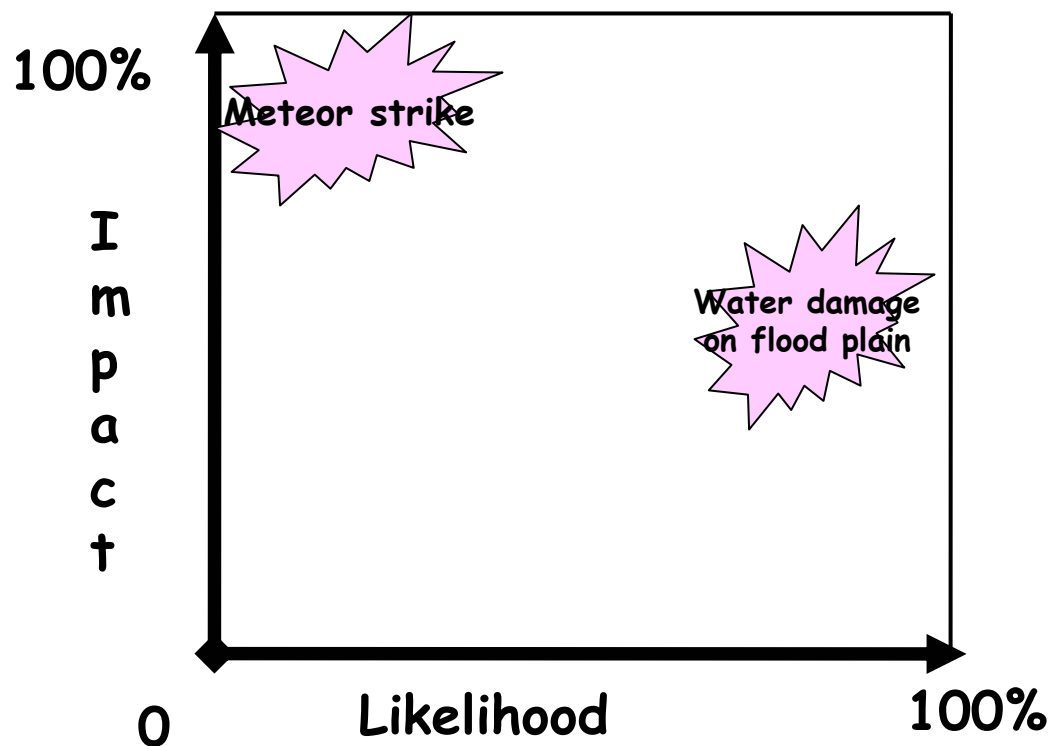
- Identify agency/business functions
- Determine impact of incident
- Estimate loss to agency/business
- Determine recovery timeframes
- Gather requirements for recovery

# Risk Assessment

- Lost document
- Ability to provide secondary services affected
- One or two primary services affected
- Destruction of major building: non-work hours
- Destruction of major building: work hours
- Severe localized natural disaster
- Most severe conceivable; national scope

# Risk Assessment

*How do you rate these risks?*





# Vital Records Plan

## *Questions*

- What type of information is needed during an emergency?
  - What are the critical functions of the agency that must continue during an emergency?
  - Which records are needed to support those functions?

# Vital Records Plan

## *Questions*

- Which records support critical program activities?
  - Emergency personnel lists;
  - Building blueprints; and
  - Software documentation
- Which records protect legal and financial rights?
- What procedures/resources are needed to protect and recover records?

# Vital Records Plan

*Each agency's functional responsibilities and business needs are different. So an agency must decide which records are vital records and assign responsibility for them to the appropriate staff.*

# Identify Vital Records

## Method

- Survey or questionnaire
- Physical inventory

## Format

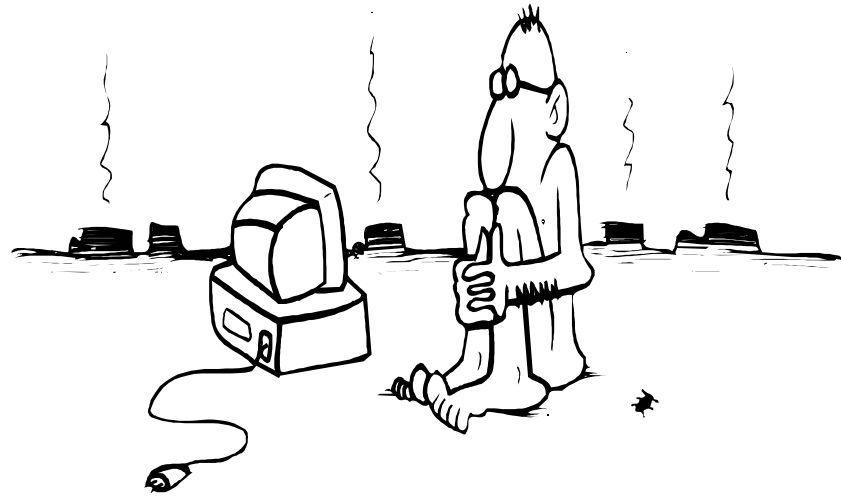
- Paper records by record series
- Electronic records by info system

***Identify records absolutely necessary for  
your office to function in the event of a  
disaster***

# Prepare Copies

*Paper* - Generally  
accessible under the  
worst circumstances

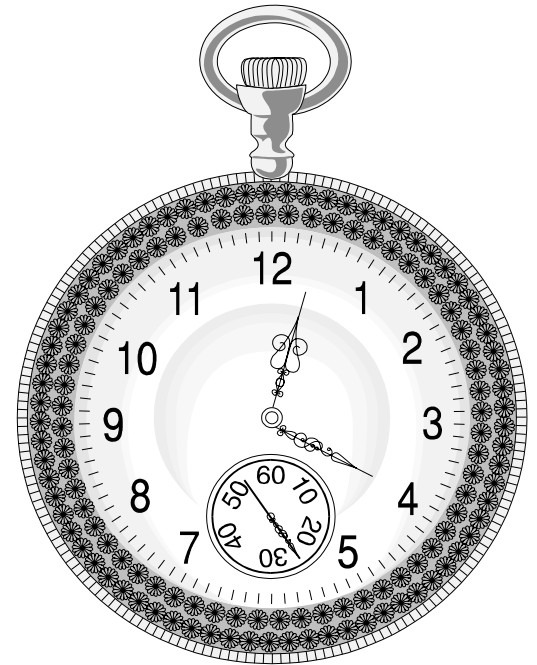
*Electronic* - Require  
special equipment to  
read



# Vital Records

## Cycling/Rotation

Vital Records must be updated often. They should be rotated or cycled on a regular basis so the latest version will be available in the event of a disaster.



# Storage/Dispersal

*Vital records should be stored off-site*

- 30 miles away for emergency operating records
- Legal and financial rights records can be stored further away





# Off-Site Storage Options

- Regional Office
- Agency Owned and Operation Facility:
- NARA Records Center
- Office of Different Agency
- Commercial Storage
- Hot Site: Office space somewhere else all wired and ready to work in.
- Cold Site: Empty office space somewhere else, not wired.

# Vital Records

Document (make a list) your vital records.

Indicate:

- Types of records
- Where they are kept
- Updates to the records
- Off-site location(s)
- Media type (CD, tape, paper, etc.)
- Records accessibility



# Vital Records and Information Technology

Many agency functions rely on information systems (computers/networks/Internet, etc.)

Major disruptions to systems can bring some – if not all – agency operations to a halt and/or have an impact on other systems

Some electronic information are *records* that require careful management

# A Vital Records Plan

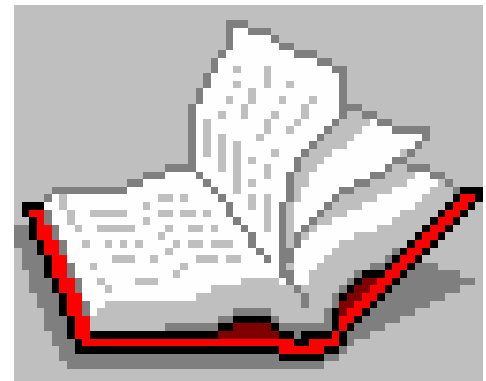
Helps an agency:

- Keep systems functioning
- Maintain data integrity, availability, and security
- Ensure system accessibility
- Recover from a disaster in a timely fashion

# Data Migration

## Document:

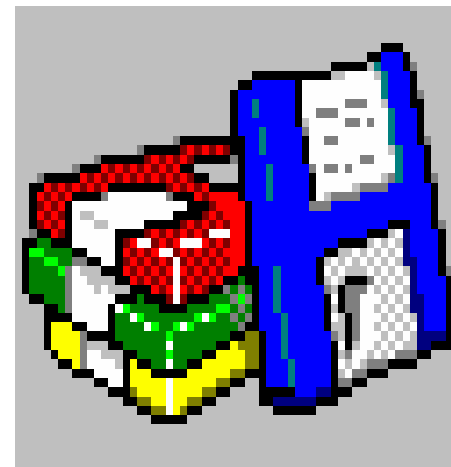
- Policies and procedures
- Hardware/software configurations
- Data backup & restoration procedures
- Employee addresses & phone lists
- Troubleshooting guides
- Business recovery plan



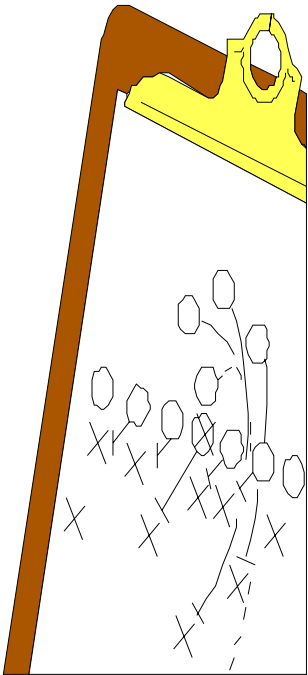
# Data Mitigation

## Document:

- Back-up methods and procedures
  - full
  - incremental
- Offsite storage
  - Cold sites
  - Hot sites
- Data recovery (Ensure backup tapes can be used on off-site computers.)
- Power supply



# Planning Issues



- Reduce confusion
- Minimize decisions
- Identify actions
- Recovery teams
- Offsite recovery
- Relocation
- Backups & documentation



# Business Resumption Planning

## *Off-Site Recovery:*

- Have pre-positioned web access, and e-mail
- Plan accessibility to critical national databases
- Set up on-the-fly transfer of main office phone line to offsite location
- Pre-place COOP plan, delegations of authorities, building blueprints, etc. at emergency site

# Vital Records Training/Testing

- Incorporate vital records into overall disaster plan
- Provide vital records training to all management and employees
- Conduct annual reviews
  - Tests of plan
  - Exercises



# Vital Records Training/Testing

## *Potential Problems:*

- Plan out of date
- Bottlenecked data links
- Lack of realistic tests
- Test becomes a disaster
- Acceptable down-time changed
- Needed personnel were not available
- Equipment not available

# Vital Records

## *Summary*

- Vital records get you back to work!
- Vital records protect government and citizen interests!
- Identify and protect your vital records!

# *Thank You*

For more information on vital records  
or how to develop a vital records  
program for your office, contact:

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